

Suggested Remarks
Steven Edminster, USAID/OEDG
Launch of the Transparent and Accountable
Governance Video "Reinventing Business
Permitting, Means Better Business Climate"
New World Renaissance Hotel, Makati City
October 6, 2006

Honorable Jerry Trenas,
Honorable Alfonso Casurra,
Distinguished Mayors of TAG Cities,
Honored Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Magandang gabi po sa ating lahat.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to join you this evening for the launch of the great video we just saw that highlights one of the particularly noteworthy successes of the Transparent and Accountable Governance (TAG) Project's partnership with the city governments in Mindanao. In seeing the video and hearing about the dramatic impact of the reforms that TAG participating cities have made in the issuance of business permits and

licenses, it is clear to me that this work indeed lives up to the video's name, "Reinventing Business Permitting Means Better Business Climate."

Development Assistance from the American people supports the Government of the Philippines in promoting more sustainable and equitable growth. We believe that USAID's support in the areas of governance, economic policy reform, conflict reduction, health, environment and education all contribute towards creating a more favorable investment climate in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao where a majority of our resources are focused. As the video we are launching this evening shows, activities like the local governance component of TAG play an important role in improving the competitiveness of Mindanao and promoting a more equitable distribution of economic opportunities.

Minimizing the cost of doing business and enhancing the responsiveness of local government to business - especially when taken together with other important factors like the dynamism of the local economy, and the adequacy of infrastructure and human resources - sends a very strong message to potential investors that your cities are "open for business."

Ultimately, as your cities become more competitive and attract more business activity, the poor gain faster and greater access to the benefits of economic growth, and your cities can better address the needs of their residents.

I won't go further into the specifics of the city government reforms carried out under TAG since the video already did a far better job of that than I could. I would, however, like to honor and commend all involved in the TAG cities effort for a job well done.

First and foremost, the results we saw in the video could not have taken place without the strong commitment and hard work of the city governments themselves. The TAG cities share several important characteristics that have contributed to their success, including strong leadership with the vision and will to examine and change management practices. They also have dedicated and empowered staffs.

I also want to acknowledge the participation of local chambers of commerce and members of the Mindanao Coalition for Development (MINCODE), whose thoughtful input on how to negotiate the reform process ultimately made the reforms more effective. The TAG experience proves that a consultative process that broadly solicits the views of key stakeholders is far more likely to succeed in the end.

The League of Cities of the Philippines and the Ateneo School of Government also deserve

praise for the technical assistance they ably provided to city governments. Last but not least, I want to acknowledge the hard work of the Asia Foundation. I particularly want to commend Bing Bonoan and Lito Tenebro for doing such a good job of working with all of TAG's partners working on governance reforms in TAG cities to support their efforts and make sure that our assistance has stayed on track.

Your collective efforts provide a powerful example of what can be done to reform city governance. I am confident that this video will be put to good use in spreading the word on the great story that Mindanao cities have to tell.

Maraming salamat at mabuhay tayong lahat.